



Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

**SIT
WALK
STAND**

WEEK FOUR – GOD'S MYSTERIOUS PLAN

Read Ephesians 3

These first three chapters of Ephesians relate to our identity in Jesus; we are seated with him in heavenly places, not yet physically, but spiritually. He has united those Christians whom he has reconciled to himself in one body, having broken down the barriers or the wall of hostility, that separated us (chapter 2:14). *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).* At the time Paul wrote this Epistle, it was a revolutionary doctrine, and to some, it still is.

Can you imagine whom you might be sitting next to in heaven? And the wonderful thing is that we will all be equal in God's sight, be it Moses, Daniel, Paul, or Peter. Paul rightly says that it is a mystery as to how God can accomplish this. The 'Church', which is the culmination of God's plan of salvation, or the Body of Christ as it is often referred to, is a spiritual building made up of us, God's living stones.

In verse 6, Paul emphasises that it is God's plan that both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. We all belong to Christ Jesus. Many of the early Jewish Christians thought this salvation was for them only. You may remember how in Acts 10, God made it clear to Peter, in a vision, that the Gentiles were as much a part of God's plan as were the Jews and how the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were initially, very disturbed by this. As one writer puts it: *“Ephesians deals with topics at the very core of what it means to be a Christian – both in faith and in practice – regardless of any particular problem in the community.”*

- Do we find it difficult to reassess our beliefs, making sure they line up with God's word?
- What was Peter's comment in verse 28 of Acts 10?
- Do we think it a privilege, as Paul says in verses 7 and 8, to be serving God by spreading this Good News?
- How, and to whom, do we do this?

Verses 10 to 12 say: *“God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. Because*

of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence."

- What do you think these verses mean?
- When we come to God in prayer, do we believe he hears and answers us?
- Have you experienced this?
- People often think that God hasn't heard because they haven't got an answer they recognise or it isn't the answer they want. Does God ignore us?

It would seem from verse 13 that people were despondent because of all that Paul had gone through and was going through, and perhaps doubting what he was teaching.

- What was Paul's response to this?
- Can you think of others in the Bible who had suffered trials because of their faith in God?
- Think of Daniel and his friends from our recent studies. Did they lose heart?
- When we look back through the centuries and think of people who suffered trials, do we understand the importance of their testimony.

In the 16th century, Archbishop Cranmer served in that role under Henry VIII, Edward VI and for a very short time Mary I. Cranmer was the one who helped build the case for the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, one of the causes of the separation of the English Church from the Church of Rome. He established the first doctrinal and liturgical structures of the Church of England and published the first officially authorised vernacular service. Until then all church services were in Latin. When Mary I, a staunch Catholic, came to the throne he was eventually burned at the stake in March 1556. Whilst the fire gradually engulfed him, he said: "I see the heavens open, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God". The last words of a man who changed the course of history in England forever.

It's good to remind ourselves of people whose faith and trust in God remained steadfast, even in fiery trials.

Read verses 13-15

God's plan may seem very mysterious at times, and yet Paul's faith was unshakeable.

- Do we have that belief? When we go through hard times, can we fall on our knees and pray to our Father in heaven?
- What is it that Paul says in verse 16?

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 we read: *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Here again, we have an example of the mysterious ways in which God works. Our natural mind would say we have to make ourselves strong and avoid insults and difficulties. Yet Paul is saying the exact opposite.

- How do we explain those verses in Corinthians?
- Can we recall any instances when we have experienced this?

Read verses 16:21

Paul was not some superman and not a powerful speaker, he tells us that some people thought his speaking “contemptible” (2 Cor. 10) and justifies himself by explaining that he was “untrained in speech, but not in knowledge”

“I’m not trying to frighten you by my letters. For some say, ‘Paul’s letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are worthless!’ Those people should realize that our actions when we arrive in person will be as forceful as what we say in our letters from far away.”

We often tell ourselves, that the likes of Paul and others, are way beyond what we could ever be. We say we are not able to speak well in public, but evidently many thought that Paul couldn’t do that.

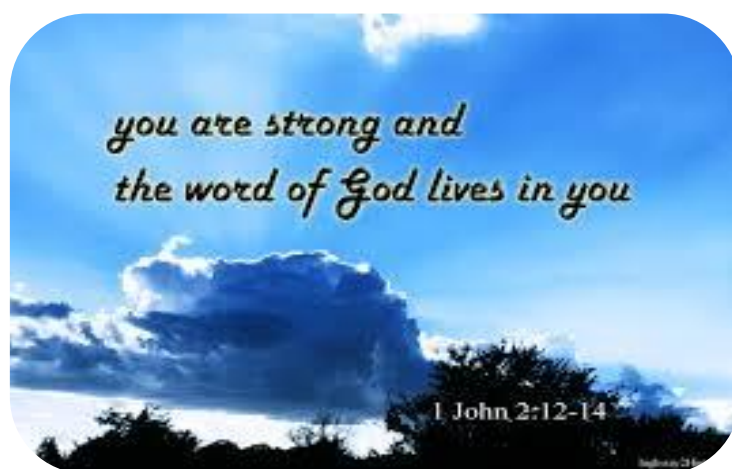
There are no excuses for us to say we cannot do things. God will *empower us with inner strength through his Spirit (verse 16).*

Our roots will grow down into God’s love and keep us strong (verse 17).

Above all, Paul is anxious that we should understand the enormity of God’s love for us (verse 18).

*“May you experience the love of Christ, **THOUGH IT IS TOO GREAT TO UNDERSTAND FULLY. THEN YOU WILL BE MADE COMPLETE WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF LIFE AND POWER THAT COMES FROM GOD.**”*

We’ve said many times, that God’s ways are not our ways. It does seem strange, or mysterious, that God wants to use people like us. People who feel they are not qualified or confident. However, if God has called us to do something, he will equip us to do that job.



Father God, help us to understand that our strength comes from you and by trusting in your word. Enable us to realise that we are your representatives commissioned to tell others about your wonderful love and grace.